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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

TO : O/DG - Mr. John M. Steeves

FROM : O/ER - Leslie L. Rood, Chairman of Working  
Group on Tours of Duty

SUBJECT: TOURS OF DUTY IN THE FOREIGN SERVICE

DATE: November 7, 1966

The length of a Foreign Service tour of duty has great impact upon the effectiveness of the post, upon the Department of State budget and upon the employee morale and career development. Over the years, it has been a subject of much controversy and many studies.

The basic problem is a conflict between the forces tending toward long tours and those tending toward short tours. The need at a post for officers who have deep experience in the country and a practical command of the local language argues for long tours. The expense of moving personnel and household effects also argues for long tours. On the other hand, in a small Service which staffs over 300 geographically scattered posts and meets constantly changing international situations, management must frequently transfer personnel for operational reasons. The officers themselves welcome movement which so often involves advancement, and at many posts, of course, health conditions and isolation call for short tours.

Before going further it may be well to say that a tour of duty in Department of State parlance is the time elapsed between first arrival at a post and last departure from the post, including the time passed on home leave or rest and recuperation leave which may fall in the middle of the tour. (A tour of duty is not merely the time between home leaves.) Home leave is leave taken in the United States with travel paid by the Government. Rest and recuperation, or R & R, is leave taken from a hardship post to a relief area with travel paid by the Government.

In the post war years, when a growing Foreign Service was called upon to cope with a deluge of new problems, there was more than the usual amount of movement. This was accentuated by the short cycle dictated by the rigid statutory provision for home leave after two years abroad. As part of a long continuing effort to lengthen tours, the Department in 1961 obtained legislation authorizing home leave at any time between 18 and 36 months and, at hardship posts, rest and recuperation travel each year in a tour of two years or over. This was to enable the Department to take into account the substantial differences in geographic conditions and career opportunities between various posts. In early 1963 the Department instituted the present policy of tailoring

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tours to the conditions at the post and the rank and position of the employee. The primary purposes of the new policy were to lengthen tours and to provide flexibility in assignments.

#### Types of Tours

Under the 1963 policy, which is still in effect, there are a number of standard tours which can be assigned. Each is followed by home leave and transfer and most have variations of leave patterns:

18 months

2 years

- (a) unbroken
- (b) broken by 1 R & R

3 years

- (a) unbroken
- (b) broken by home leave after 18 months
- (c) broken by 1 or 2 R & R's

4 years

- (a) broken by home leave after 2 years
- (b) broken by home leave and 1 or 2 R & R's

5 years

- (a) broken by home leave after 3 years
- (b) broken by home leave after 3 years and by 1, 2 or 3 R & R's

The purpose of the range of tours is to make it possible, for example, for the Deputy Chief of Mission to be assigned for a tour of 5 years and the subordinate economic officer for 3 years, or for a tour in Paris to be 5 years and a tour in Saigon to be 18 months. As mentioned above, when the post has hardship conditions and is so distant from a change of surroundings that the employees cannot reasonably be expected to pay their own transportation to a suitable vacation place, the Department pays for that transportation once in a two-year stay at the post. This rest and recuperation leave enables the Department to assign employees to hardship posts for longer tours.

With the list of tours to choose from, each post, depending upon its characteristics, is given a range of tours which the Department may use in assigning to it employees of various ranks and functions. A complete list of posts and tours is at Tab A. The table below gives an idea of the range of tours:

3

	<u>18 mos.</u>	<u>2 yrs.</u>	<u>18&amp;18</u>	<u>3 yrs.</u>	<u>2&amp;2</u>	<u>3&amp;2</u>
<u>Saigon</u>						
FSO-1 to 5 & FSSO	X	X				
FSO-6 to 8 & FSS	X					
<u>Fort Lamy</u>						
FSO-1 to 5 & FSSO		X(1R&R)		X(2R&R)		
FSO-6 to 8 & FSS		X(1R&R)				
<u>Bern</u>						
FSO-1 to 5 & FSSO				X	X	X
FSO-6 to 8 & FSS		X				
<u>Prague</u>						
FSO-1 to 5 & FSSO		X		X		
FSO-6 to 8 & FSS	X	X				
<u>Madras</u>						
FSO-1 to 5 & FSSO		X(1R&R)	X			
FSO-6 to 8 & FSS		X(1R&R)				

The total list of tours and even the range of tours at a particular post are bewilderingly many, but in practice the field of choice has been narrowed. The following are some generally followed patterns:

- (a) Secretaries and clerical personnel, FSS-7 to 10, are assigned tours of 18 months or 2 years. Because they usually have no families, they do not wish to remain at a post for a long period. Since they are difficult to recruit and hold, this preference is recognized. The need to retain them in the Service outweighs the need for their experience at the post.
- (b) Junior Foreign Service officers, FSO-8 to 6, are assigned tours of 2 years in order to give them a variety of experience during their training period.
- (c) The majority of senior and mid-career FSO's and FSSO's at any one post are usually assigned the same tour. Only the exceptional case receives a shorter or longer tour.

Since the tours of junior Foreign Service officers and of FSS support personnel are always short and since the tours of FSSO's tend to follow the pattern set by senior and mid-career FSO's, the primary problem is the tours of these latter. Most of the statistics, discussion and recommendations in this paper center on tours of senior and mid-career FSO's. It is, of course, the need for experience and continuity at post of the seniors and mids which is central to the whole problem of tours of duty.

### Policy and Regulations

The Department's tour of duty policy and the range of tours is set forth in the regulations, 3 FAM 143, but unfortunately the many revisions have caused the original purpose of the policy to become obscured. Nor have the many recent strictures aimed at better implementation been added to the regulations. Administrators and personnel officers are generally familiar with the policy but most other officers have only fragmentary and vague knowledge of it. Nor has there been a single document they could turn to for information.

The Working Group is proposing revised regulations (Tab G) whose principal provisions are set forth below:

... it is difficult to establish a standard tour of duty or even to lay down rigid rules for determining tours of duty. However, it is the intent of the policy that tours be as long as possible, consistent with efficiency ...

Primary Consideration - In balancing the various considerations determining the duration of a tour of duty, the necessity for the effective accomplishment of the Government's business will be given greater weight than any other consideration.

Experience and Continuity at Post - The productivity and usefulness of an employee increases as he gains experience in his job, in the community and in the local language. A tour should be long enough to make maximum use of this experience gained in the early stages of the tour and to provide the continuity which is essential in post operations ...

Career Development - It is in the Government's interest that the abilities of its officers be increased through a variety of experiences and a series of increasingly responsible positions. . .

Economy - Savings in travel and transportation should be effected insofar as possible by longer tours, shorter distances of transfer and combination of home leave with transfer.

Personal Preference - Satisfying the personal preference of an employee concerning a tour of duty has a strong influence upon the employee's effectiveness. This preference may be based upon interest in an area or function, career aspirations, family status, educational needs of children, availability of housing or health conditions.

Living Conditions - Hardship, unhealthful conditions, isolation and uncomfortable climate at a post are reasons for assigning tours which are shorter than normal standards would require. Longer tours at such posts may impair employee efficiency and morale. However, the availability of Government paid travel to rest and recuperation areas

shall be considered in determining the duration of a tour and shall be used as a positive factor in increasing the length of tours of duty as well as in alleviation of hardship conditions.

Spacing of Transfers - Care should be exercised that a post's operations are not weakened by the transfer of too many key officers of State and of other agencies at one time. The Ambassador and the Country Director, as well as personnel officers, should take appropriate action to avoid this.

Two Years - A two-year tour for senior and mid-career officers should be assigned only when conditions at the post make a short tour absolutely necessary. Every attempt should be made to eliminate the need for two-year tours by improving the conditions of service at such posts, by higher differentials, by greater career opportunities, by use of home leave and rest and recuperation travel, and by other means.

Professional Challenge - The degree of professional challenge and expected growth in the officer's ability should be considered in making assignments. This is particularly true in those assignments involving longer tours, since the normal increase in an officers' ability and rank during the course of a tour could create a disparity between his capacity and the responsibilities of the position assigned to him at the beginning of the tour ...

Training - Training assignments should normally be at the beginning, during, or at the end of an assignment in the United States ...

#### Assigned Tours

Though the flexible policy gives the regional bureau great latitude in assigning tours, most of the tours assigned are for the period of three or four years. That over three-fifths of tours fall in this time period is natural since this is the tour which is considered by most officers to be optimum--not too short and not too long. It enables the officer to be at the post for a reasonably long period after gaining experience and yet does not raise the question of losing perspective through protracted residence in one country. While the three-year tour is attractive because shorter, the four-year tour is attractive because it affords a home leave after the first two years. The 18 months is assigned only in Vietnam where dependants do not accompany the officer. The two-year tour is assigned at some of the severe hardship posts and behind the Iron Curtain. The five-year tour is assigned only at the "good" posts, mainly in Western Europe. The percentage of senior and mid-career officers overseas who are assigned each tour is shown in Tab B and summarized here:

Assigned Tours - Overseas

<u>Tours</u>	<u>% of Officers</u>
18 months	1
2 years	18
3 years	28
4 years	39
5 years	19 14?
	<u>100</u>
	105%

It might be noted that much of the Department's early efforts on tours of duty was directed toward the assigned tour. The legislation of 1961 and the flexible policy of 1963 both concern the assigned tours.

Actual Tours

While the assigned tour is important in that it sets a goal toward which the Department and the employee aim, the crucial measure of effective employment of personnel is the actual tour--the time actually served at post between first arrival and final departure. Statistics compiled on senior and mid-career officers who departed their overseas posts after completing a tour in 1965 show that the average actual tour was 34.3 months. The details are shown at Tab C.

It is noticeable that average tours are long in Europe and short in Africa, reflecting the great difference in living conditions and assigned tours in those two areas.

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Average Actual Tours by Region

<u>Region</u>	<u>Months</u>
AF	27.8
ARA	34.4
EUR	39.5
FE	29.7
NEA	35.3

Whatever may be the theory of the flexible tour of duty policy, the figures for 1965 show that there is no clear pattern of difference between the tours of senior officers and those of mid-career officers:

Average Actual Tours by Class

<u>Class</u>	<u>Months</u>
O-1, CM, CA	35.2
O-2	32.7
O-3	36.2
O-4	35.9
O-5	31.1

Despite the long continued efforts by the Department and the leave legislation of 1961, the length of the average actual tour overseas increased only from 32.8 months in 1960 to 34.2 months in 1964 and to 34.3 in 1965. This is an improvement of only 1.5 months, or less than 5%. The world-wide figure yields slowly and minutely. Almost 60% of the assigned tours are for four years or more, and yet the average actual tour is less than three years.

In contrast with the situation overseas, our efforts to lengthen actual tours in Washington have been quite successful. The average actual tour in 1960 was 32.1 months, but the establishment of the 4-year assigned tour in Washington had raised the actual tour to 40.6 months by 1964. The reasons for this improvement are obvious. While some of the pressures which cause transfers abroad may also exist in Washington--operational needs and officer preference for field assignments--others do not: officers may be moved from job to job in the Department without change of post; health and school needs are never a reason to move from Washington; and there are not the short, hardship tours which pull down the overseas averages. Furthermore, some officers serve much longer than four years, thus pulling up the averages.

Broken Tours

A survey of the tours of 638 senior and mid-career FSO's and FSSO's who departed from overseas posts in 1965 shows that roughly half of the officers failed to complete their assigned tour (Tab E). The survey judged the record in two ways--leniently and strictly. By the lenient standard, the tour was counted as completed if the officer remained for almost the full tour, for example, for 44 months of a four-year tour. By the strict standard, the tour was counted as completed only if the officer remained the full time, for example, four years plus the two months of home leave which intervened in the middle of his tour. By the lenient standard, 56% completed their tours, and by the strict standard, 45% completed their tours.

Broken Tours

Broken Tours  
Senior and Mid-Career FSO's and FSSO's  
Overseas - 1965

	<u>2 years</u>	<u>3 years</u>	<u>4 years</u>	<u>5 years</u>	<u>Total</u>
Number of tours	175	136	212	104	638
Broken - lenient	26%	46%	58%	51%	45%
Broken - strict	26%	59%	72%	75%	56%
Average Actual Tour	23.6	29.7	37.4	49.7	34.0

As the length of the assigned tour increases, the probability that it will be broken increases. By the lenient standard, one out of four 2-year tours are broken, almost one out of two 3-year tours are broken and over one out of two 4- and 5-year tours are broken.

However, it should be noted that the actual time served at the post increases as the assigned tour increases. For example, the average actual tour is 29.7 months for those assigned a 3-year tour and is 37.4 months for those assigned a 4-year tour. Though there can be question whether the assignment of longer tours is worthwhile if they are not being served out, the answer would seem to be that longer assigned tours do result in longer stays at the post. Aside from this there is the obvious reason that longer assigned tours plus stricter compliance with these tours will result in longer actual tours.

Why is it that half of the assigned tours are broken? A survey was made of all broken tours of senior and mid-career FSO's and FSSO's which terminated in 1965, using the lenient standard (Tab F). It shows the following reasons for broken tours:

Reasons for Broken Tours

	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
1. Resignations, retirements, deaths	49	17 ✓
2. Post opened or closed, position moved or abolished	20	7 ✓
3. Change in key position - Ambassador, DCM, AID Dir., Country Dir., or above	19	6 ✓
4. Medical, compassionate, suitability	63	22 ✓
5. Within country transfer	10	3 ✓
6. Operational needs of the Service	58	20



	Number	%
7. Special requirements of SY and other Departments (Commerce, Labor)	13	4
8. Training	24	8
9. Changes in original assigned tour	17	6
10. Other	20	7
	<u>293</u>	<u>100</u>

Any tour which ended early was counted as broken since there is no clear line between the justified and the unjustified. The table descends from the most justifiable to the least justifiable reasons.

The most significant conclusion which emerges from the survey is that about half of the tours were broken for reasons which are unavoidable--death and medical reasons being among them.

There are categories which offer opportunities for tighter implementation, but it must be remembered that this may involve sacrifices of operating flexibility. For example, if we were to hold rigidly to assigned tours in order to hold down the broken tours in the category "operational needs of the Service," it would mean that those critical vacancies would have to be filled by the assignment of officers whose tours were ending at precisely the time the vacancy arises. The need for the full tour (i.e., the need for experience at post) must always be weighed against the need for the particular officer in the new position for which he is being considered.

#### Economy

The major cost benefit in longer tours is the increased effectiveness of the officer who has experience and continuity at the post. In general, officers with several years experience at post are more useful than are newly arrived officers.

A senior or mid-career officer costs the Government about \$25,000 a year, including salary, allowances, travel, retirement and other personnel costs. It therefore behooves the Government to make maximum use of the officer's time and ability. Every time he is uprooted there is a period of breaking off duties, formal good-byes, packing, traveling, consultation, house hunting, unpacking, getting acquainted, learning new functions and learning or refreshing a language. The time required for all this can vary from one week to one year depending upon the officer and the nature of the change. A rough estimate is that the officer loses one month through total absence from his office and that his reduced effectiveness over the year surrounding the transfer may equal an additional month of work. If this estimate is correct, each transfer costs up to two months of officer time or about \$4,000.

The other cost factor in a tour of duty is the expense for travel and

for movement of household effects. These costs are difficult to analyze because there are a great variety of types of transfer (U.S. to post, home leave and transfer, etc.) and great variation in sizes of families and amounts of effects. In general, an average home leave costs about \$3500 and an average movement of effects for a senior or mid-career officer costs in the neighborhood of \$2000.

The lengthening of a tour, for example, from three years to four years, saves money because the \$2000 expenditure for movement of effects comes once in four years rather than once in three years. However, the savings on travel costs are less clear. A large share of transfers coincide with home leave, and the cost of the home leave travel is usually enough to cover the cost of the transfer travel. In these cases since the home leave travel would have been performed whether or not there was a transfer, it is difficult to say that the expense is attributable to a transfer. There is the added difficulty that the lengthening of a tour may cause more frequent home leave and therefore added costs. This is the case, for example, where a tour of three years without home leave is extended to a tour of four years with home leave. This added home leave cost may completely counterbalance the small savings on movement of effects.

Though an exhaustive study of the complicated costs and varied situations has not been made, it seems clear that the possibilities for savings through lengthening of tours are modest. The greatest saving which could be made is in the lengthening of the time between home leaves, rather than in the lengthening of tours, but this would seem neither desirable nor in consonance with current trends in business or government.

#### Rest and Recuperation Leave

In an extensive person-by-person survey during 1966 the Department determined that tours at R & R posts have increased by 3.7 months since the advent of R & R. There have been other factors which have contributed to this lengthening of tours, such as improved health conditions, better housing and the Department's pressure for longer tours, but certainly the availability of R & R has been a major factor in this increase. Computations based upon the survey show that the R & R costs are being partially compensated for by the longer intervals between home leaves which the program has made possible.

#### Alternatives to Present Policy

The results of present Department of State tour of duty policy are less than perfect. Though one of the policy's primary purposes was to lengthen tours, it has succeeded in extending tours overseas by less than 5%. Furthermore, the Foreign Service still gives the impression, rightly or wrongly, to some responsible outsiders of being a game of musical chairs. What are the alternatives to the present policy? There are several:

Alternative 1. Tours of 2, 4 or 6 years based upon home leave every two years. This is essentially the system used by State before 1962 and used

by AID at present. AID assigns two-year tours and returns the officer to the post when it is desirable. This system recognizes that most Foreign Service employees want home leave as often as possible and that the employer does what it can to comply with this wish. By recognizing that the two-year period between home leaves is the most common, it comes closer to reality than does the complex schedule of tours which State now has. Under this 2-4-6 policy, State would usually assign a 4-year tour broken by home leave, since tours of 2 or 6 years are generally too extreme. The disadvantage of the policy is that it does not have the variety which would enable State to raise the length of a tour gradually, for example, the assignment of a tour of 18 months plus 18 months instead of two years. Raising a tour from two years to four years is a big jump.

Alternative 2. In normal posts a first stay of three years and then home leave, and in hardship posts a first stay of two years and then home leave. In all posts a second stay of two years, though not assigned in the first instance, would be encouraged. This is present USIA policy. This policy has the virtue of requiring a first stay of three years and thus decreasing the number of tours which are terminated at two years when the employee departs on home leave. The policy has the additional virtue of being economical since it cuts down the number of home leave trips. The disadvantage of the system is that it stakes too much on obtaining a long first stay at the post and in so doing may decrease the possibility of a second stay. It lacks the range of choice which enables the employer and the employee to agree upon a slightly longer tour, for example, a tour of two plus two instead of three years. And lastly, it is unpopular with employees who wish frequent home leave.

Alternative 3. Implement the present flexible policy in a manner which will increase the average length of tours. A major reason for injecting flexibility into the present Department policy was to lengthen the tour of duty; but it has not been used for that purpose in enough cases. Lack of appreciable increase in average actual tours overseas demonstrates this.

There is no panacea, no single change in implementation which will greatly improve results under the present policy. The solution is a general tightening of implementation in the assignment process and in the carrying out of assigned tours. In the last year, this process has already begun and the statistics for 1966 will probably show the results.

#### State, USIA and AID

Extensive discussions have been held between the representative of the three foreign affairs agencies in an effort to find a common policy on tours of duty. Each agency has up to now, however, found its own policy to fit its needs best and has been reluctant to abandon that policy for the purpose of attaining uniformity. Efforts to attain a common policy will continue.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. That we continue the present flexible policy on tours of duty but that implementation be firm enough to lengthen the actual tours being served.

2. That we have a clear statement of policy.

The regulations have been redrafted to obtain clarity and to make plain that longer tours are a primary objective (Tab G).

3. That we make clear to officers that the need of the Government for a tour of reasonable length outweighs the officers' need for career development and his personal preferences.

This Report and its findings will be publicized in the Newsletter, in the Journal, and in official messages.

4. That we seek understanding by senior officials in the Department and in Missions that they should not try to fill their staffing needs by breaking the tours of officers already assigned, except in unusual circumstances.

This report will be brought to the attention of senior officers. A proposed letter is at Tab H.

5. That personnel placement officers in the Department be constantly alert to the need for longer tours. The greatest single opportunity for improved implementation of policy is in the day-to-day functions of deciding how long a tour should be assigned and of deciding whether to transfer an officer.

Through participation in this Working Group, many key personnel officers have already been impressed with this opportunity. This Report will be brought to the attention of other personnel officers. Personnel officers will be urged to take these specific actions:

- (a) assign the longest possible tour which is consistent with post conditions and career development.
- (b) break a tour only for compelling reasons; a training assignment is not normally a reason for breaking a tour.
- (c) a tour should not be terminated merely because the time stated in the assignment order has elapsed; an onward assignment must also be at hand.

6. That three years should be thought of as the normal minimum tour of duty. There will continue to be a few posts where two years will be the minimum but every effort should be made to lengthen these tours through alleviation of hardship, through liberal granting of leave, through greater rewards to the employees serving there and by other means.

This should be encouraged by senior administrative officials and gradually implemented by the geographical bureaus.

7. That statistics on length of tours and reasons for breaking tours be compiled annually so that the Department can know its progress and its shortcomings. This should be done by machine as soon as practicable.

Responsibility for this should rest with the Director General.

8. That an average actual tour of three years overseas and of four years at home be the Department's goal. These figures are defensible against the merry-go-round criticism. The stretching which they will require will raise most tours to the optimum--a balance between the need for continuity and the need for career development.

9. That each post consult with employees from time to time about the extension of tours. Offers of change of duty, increased responsibility and within country transfers may be part of this.

Some bureaus have already inaugurated such a program and are obtaining good results.

10. That the Working Group on Tours of Duty continue in being, compile statistics on 1966 as soon as possible, prepare additional recommendations based on those statistics, and work with representatives of USIA and AID in an effort to arrive at a common tour of duty policy for the three foreign affairs agencies.

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